



# StoneSoup

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# StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

## Editor's Note

It is June. I feel like sighing with relief even writing those words. There is something about summer, even when you're no longer in school, that just makes you relax. The heat makes everyone slow down, I guess—and people take vacation, which means the working world can't move at its usual pace.

Even though I had so much time in the summer growing up, I always found myself gravitating toward poetry and shorter books during June, July, and August. Short but serious. Pieces that I could read quickly, as if they were melting popsicles.

So, this June, here is an issue of shorter pieces to dip in and out of as you finish school and make your way to the beach or pool. I love how so many of these pieces focus on the smallest moments in our lives—like taking a test—but in a way that turns them into unusual, and in some cases even fantastical, events.

Read! Write! Relax! Enjoy the start of summer.



On the cover:  
*Happy Camper*  
(Assorted natural materials)  
Sage Millen, 13  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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*Abstract Self Portrait (Adobe Sketch)*  
 Jaslene Kwack, 11  
 Lisle, IL

# Just One Letter Away

**It's the last day of school before summer vacation, but Ia isn't happy—it's the last day she'll see her best friend**



By Ia Sofocleous, 11  
New York, NY

The stairwell was filled with laughter, giggles, and cheerful voices as we left the school building on the last day of fourth grade. Somewhere on the stairwell was Yaara. Yaara was one of the most kindhearted girls I had ever met. Unlike most of the other girls in fourth grade, she never excluded anyone. When we would goof off at lunch, I never had to worry about her criticizing me, or thinking I was weird.

Yaara was about as tall as me and had dark brown hair that was always in a ponytail. She always made people laugh, even when she wasn't trying to be funny. We had our own inside jokes, and once, we even tried to create our own secret language. She was a very positive person. Yaara was almost always smiling, or giggling. I had known her since the beginning of fourth grade, and over the year we had become really close friends. But now she was leaving, moving, and I wondered if I would ever see her again.

Everyone tossed their hands in the air and screamed "FREEDOM!!!" when we walked out the big red doors, toward our dismissal spot. I couldn't

believe they were cheering on the day I was losing a friend. It seemed impossible that in under five minutes, Yaara would be gone. Unfortunately, it was happening, and I had to find a way to accept that.

I felt the soft summer breeze blow on my face and through my hair. The air was filled with the sweet smell of flowers. I watched as the younger kids strolled by with their parents. The sight of summer was so enchanting that, for a moment, I forgot about the fact that Yaara was moving.

Everywhere I looked, people were smiling, making plans to get ice cream, and discussing where they would be going for summer vacation. I would be going to Greece soon, just like every year, to see my dad's family. Greece was close to Israel, but Yaara wouldn't be in Israel when I was in Greece. She'd be in Hong Kong.

Yaara had moved before. She was born in Israel and lived there for a couple years, but she had told me she was too young to remember any of it. After that, she had moved to the US. She came here, to New York City, when she was seven or eight. Her family would be spending



## For a minute, it seemed realistic that Yaara would be back in September, ready to attend fifth grade.

the summer in Hong Kong and then moving to Israel at the end of the summer.

As we stood at our dismissal spot, under the shade of a beautiful tree, most of the other students were deep in conversation. I wasn't. In normal years, I would've joined in on the debates about which ice cream flavor was best, and the contests to see who would be traveling the farthest during summer vacation. This year I couldn't.

Every time someone walked by, my heart beat faster, and I got worried they would be the person who would pick Yaara up from school.

I couldn't believe she was leaving. It seemed like all the truly kind people had to leave. One of my friends in kindergarten had moved away, and another one of my good friends had moved away in first grade. I had lost touch with both of them, and I didn't want to lose touch with Yaara.

I remembered the day Yaara's dog died. Yaara was generally a very cheerful person, but that day she had seemed depressed. Everyone kept asking her what was wrong, but she didn't want to tell us. All around, people were asking things like, "What's wrong?" or "Are you okay?" and "Why is Yaara sad?"

Our friends Andjelina and Caitlin kept asking, but still she didn't answer.

Then at lunch, she told me what had happened. "My dog died last night," she had said, her voice filled with sorrow. "My mom told me and my siblings this morning."

"I know how you feel," I responded.

"My dog died this summer." We spent the rest of lunch telling each other what our dogs had been like. We shared the tragic parts, like the reasons they had died, but we also described the joyous parts, like the funny sounds they used to make, and their unique characteristics.

The rest of the day had been gloomy. It was hard to be cheerful when a dog's life had ended the day before. But deep down, I had a pleasant feeling. Yaara had told me, trusted me with her feelings. That was when I realized how close we were, and now that she was leaving, I was going to lose that friendship.

Just like I had done the day my dog had been put to sleep, I hoped for a miracle. I noticed that every time I knew something was going to happen, and I didn't want it to happen, I denied it. Even though I didn't believe in miracles, I had convinced myself that Yaara wasn't going away. The day my dog was going to be put to sleep, I imagined instead of being put to sleep, she would all of a sudden be healed and be able to walk again. Now, I imagined Yaara's flight would be cancelled, or her parents would change their minds, and the family would end up staying in New York. I knew it sounded crazy, but for a minute, I actually believed she wouldn't leave. For a minute, it seemed realistic that Yaara would be back in September, ready to attend fifth grade.

But of course, that was just a fantasy.

Yaara's brother trotted toward our dismissal spot. I couldn't believe it. Yaara was actually leaving.

I watched as she went around saying goodbye to all her friends. The students who hadn't been picked up yet muttered things like "Bye, Yaara" and "We'll miss you" and "Have a safe trip."

Then Yaara turned to me. I hugged her and said goodbye. "We're pen pals, right?" I asked, remembering the plan we had made earlier.

"Right," she answered. "I'll send you a letter once I've moved into my house in Israel."

"I'll really miss you," I said, still not being able to believe she was leaving.

"Me too," she responded. Then she headed toward our teachers, where they checked her name off their list. The teachers hugged her and told her they'd miss her, and then she stepped toward her brother.

I watched as they made their way down the street, walking side by side, until they disappeared behind the parked cars, and Yaara was gone.

The rest of the afternoon was a blur. I was so focused on the fact that Yaara had left that I couldn't pay attention to everything else that was going on.

I cried that night. I was worried I would lose contact with Yaara. I was worried she would forget about me. Or even worse, I would forget about her.

Then I remembered what she had said before she left. We would be pen pals. She said that once she had moved to Israel, she would send me a letter. Yaara would be spending the summer in Hong Kong and moving

to Israel in September. All I had to do was wait for September.

Even though it was only two months away, September seemed like it would never come. My worries came back. Two months was enough time for Yaara to forget me, for me to forget her. Letters weren't the same as having conversations face to face. What if my friendship with Yaara ended? What if I lost contact with her, just like I had lost contact with my friends from first grade and kindergarten?

I told myself that we wouldn't forget each other. I tried to imagine that Yaara and I would reunite. I imagined that in twenty years, I would run into Yaara in a supermarket, or we would go to the same college. I told myself that letters would be just as good as having conversations face to face. I imagined we would send so many letters that I would know her better than my friends who were in the same school as me. I imagined that one day, she would send a letter saying she was coming back to New York. And those were the thoughts that kept me going while I waited for her letter.

# Two Poems



By Eva Denne, 9  
Newton, NJ

## Miserable Day

It is a day.  
A miserable day.  
I hear  
Thunder booming,  
Rain crashing,  
And the slosh  
Of my brother's rain boots.  
I watch  
Through my window.  
I see  
Trees getting wet,  
Look closely and see  
Tiny droplets  
Of water.  
I see a car  
Struggling to see  
In the fogginess  
And rain.  
I am thankful  
That I  
Have a roof  
Above my head.  
In this pour down  
Of rain.



# Food Circus

I think

I think

About a circus.

Clowns juggle

1,000 cookies each.

Lions jump

Through giant donuts.

The crowd.

It watches.

Their cheeks full.

With cotton candy.

Popcorn too.

I think

I think

About a circus.

A magician

Goes

POOF.

It disappears.

I think

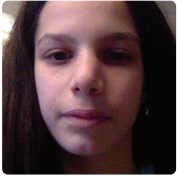
I think about a circus.



*Rainbow Wishes* (Watercolor)  
Aspen Clayton, 11  
Lisle, IL

# Birthday Party Wonderings

After ten months without attending a birthday party, the narrator has developed a new appreciation for their rituals



By Oren Milgrom-Dorfman, 12  
New York, NY

“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you!” The group of ten or so middle school girls sings the traditional birthday song with considerably less enthusiasm than the ten-year-old boys clustered around another table.

The birthday girl’s mom, who has already photographed us all at least twice, starts a countdown: “Are you one? Are you two?”

Everyone joins in. When we get to twelve, there’s a pause and then some half-hearted cheering. I’ve never really known what to do at the end of the chant. Do you cheer? Say yes? Clap? I wonder if anyone really knows the answer.

Everyone finds a seat around the picnic tables as the mom begins to slice up the birthday cake. I get a huge slice, although I’m not sure that I’ll eat it all.

The cake isn’t good, but there’s something special about store-bought birthday cakes, even though they taste like sugar and artificial flavoring. For me, they hold the memories of all the other birthday parties that I’ve been to. It’s still strange, though, that I’ve missed these bad birthday cakes in the last ten months.

I smile to myself as I walk over to the garbage can to throw out what’s left of the slice of cake.





*San Francisco Bay* (Acrylic)  
Kina Sands, 10  
Davis, CA

# Hidden Opportunities

Olivia is devastated when she learns her family is moving away from lush, beautiful California to drab, grey New York City



By Olivia Choi, 12  
New York, NY

I relaxed in my backyard, delighted by everything around me. The warm breeze rippled through the air. A symphony of birdsong erupted from the chirping birds that swooped around the sapphire blue sky. I visualized the clouds as fluffy cotton candy that you could devour in delicious wisps. A majestic palm tree's lush emerald green leaves swayed slightly. From the juicy fruits of the orange tree wafted up a wonderful fragrance. The pear tree was tiny compared to the other trees in the backyard but pleasant to look upon. A peach tree had feather-shaped leaves that varied in shades from lime to rainforest green. The peaches were soft, like satin or velvet, and refreshingly quenching. The grass tickled my ankles enticingly, swishing hypnotically like serpents.

I'd only resided in California for a little while, but that was enough for me to love it thoroughly. My spacious house was illuminated by exquisite lamps, furnished with elaborate sofas, intricately decorated chairs, and magnificent tables. The windows were iridescent and looked out onto the panorama of the backyard and

the front yard. I spent barely any time in the front yard because, instead of grass, there was the obsidian-black road. Still, it was entertaining to scrutinize the streaks of colorful blurs whiz by, the quick-moving cars. I also enjoyed the consistency, how everything stayed the same, how nothing changed unexpectedly for the worse.

Suddenly, all of those wonderful experiences began to be tainted with a hint of change. Instead of the serene contentment that settled on my family at most times, there was a general mood of frenzied liveliness. I would leap out of my comfortable bed energetically, enthusiastic and effervescent for another day filled with my magnificent life in California, then notice my parents discussing matters that were evidently significant. I only caught drifts of words that floated to my ears.

"Great opportunity . . ."

"New York City . . ."

"Amazing schools . . ."

I ignored this, my mind drifting back instead toward the last time we had moved, from Canada to here in California. It had been

quite paradisiacal. A picturesque scene with a large glassy window depicted itself in my mind. Booming fireworks of all colors thrust themselves forcefully into the dark night sky, exploding in blindingly bright sparks ...

Anyway, we couldn't be moving again! We just came here a year ago! I told myself firmly.

I bound out of the house with as much indifference as I could muster, despite the ominousness of the conversation, because, if anything changed, I didn't want to know. Unfortunately, there was nothing I could do a while later when I was called into the living room for the announcement.

"We're moving to New York City!" my mother announced, sounding ecstatic.

It took me a moment to register this, that it was true, we were moving. *I don't think it's official*, I told myself hopefully, but I knew that I had to resign myself to the fate I was being condemned to. *New York? I thought with contempt. Why can't we stay in California? Our house is here, my school is here, my friends are here ... what's in New York that's so much better?*

I clung to the few precious moments I had left of California. Everything seemed to pass in a monotonous blur, because I couldn't fully indulge in the excitement of packing, which I would normally have loved, since I knew that we were moving soon. Whenever I went to school, I felt devastated that I was leaving behind all of my friends. I'd known them for an entire year, which was a lot when you were only five—

basically one fifth of my lifetime! I'd spent so much time with them and couldn't imagine leaving them all behind. How would I stay in touch with them when I lived so far away? I dreaded moving to New York the way you would dread being pulled into a torrential riptide or a vicious tornado. And when I ended up finally moving, my suspicions were confirmed.

The view outside of my window of New York was a dilapidated building with very plain bricks meticulously woven into the figure. The crimson paint was peeling and the stairs on the fire escape might have been shimmering obsidian-black, but were now a bit tarnished and stained. Whenever I looked out of the window, I saw a few patches of blue sky, so unlike the vast field of vivid blue I'd seen before. Thick smoke occasionally covered even those rare glimpses, in which case I despaired especially.

And I most certainly did not have a backyard, let alone a luxurious one filled with piquant, appetizing fruits. I didn't have the same spacious house, so I kept thinking about all I didn't have anymore and realized how lucky I'd been before. I couldn't even take advantage of what I'd had; it was too late. I tried not to indulge in sorrow and self-pity, but who could blame me if I did? I wondered how long it would be until all of my memories of California slowly disappeared, fading into blurry images and then disintegrating into nothingness. But there was nothing I could do. I was five years old; I had no power in decisions. I felt a sense of both growing helplessness and emptiness.



## Not a day passed without me thinking longingly of California.

Everything I did, I did it without enthusiasm. This was definitely not “a place with more opportunities.” Not a day passed without me thinking longingly of California.

After I had been miserable for a considerable amount of time, I noticed that, though I personally hadn't seen any positives in moving, my parents clearly did. They seemed delighted with the condo and relished unpacking to make the place comfortable. Every day, they worked hard to make it wonderful and something that I would eventually like too. I had ignored their efforts and now comprehended that people would get weary of this. I recognized how selfish it was of me to only think of myself and how I viewed New York. After all, my parents saw as favorable the circumstances I considered unfortunate. Maybe I'd judged everything too quickly? Now that I thought about it, how long had I lived in New York? A week? Two? Not long, and definitely not long enough for me to fully comprehend the grandeur of it. I hesitantly decided that I would try to be unbiased for at least another week before I continued sulking and whining.

A while later: I smiled as I raced across Central Park. I walked along the edge of the lake, delighting in the tiny fish that flickered around, sometimes visible, sometimes dark, blending into the water. The water looked serene, with ripples occasionally spreading along the surface of the shimmering lake. It was still the summer and the air was

warm, but there was a refreshing breeze. I was just as pleased with our condo as anyone else in my family, excited for school, which was starting soon, and disgusted at my previous reaction to moving.

By the time winter came, I was fully adjusted and delighted by New York, especially when I felt the thrilling sensation of delicate snowflakes fluttering down gently, lightly landing on me and melting into an iridescent water droplet. There was no snow in California, and New York City had such a different climate from the blistering heat. I also marveled that I could walk everywhere, instead of driving from place to place, stuck with the boredom of the car. I remembered driving to school, driving to the supermarket, driving to anywhere and everywhere.

At first, I'd have given anything to be back in California, but now I realized that to truly judge things, you have to give them a chance.

# Two Poems



By Iris Chalfen, 8  
Cambridge, United Kingdom

## Springring

Whitewrite

Flyhigh

Windwing

Blossombright

Songsoul

Mebe

Beebold

## Sleep

The calm, warm light filled the room,  
Our voices, whispers.  
Laughter untangling into a soundless sleep.  
We threw ourselves into a lingering feeling.  
I held that feeling for a moment,  
Then hid it,  
Hid it so it could be safe,  
Hid it so I could carry on, on,  
In my deep, deep sleep.



*Rainbow Feather* (Pastel)  
Leticia Cheng, 9  
San Jose, CA

# Feather Finding

The writer is thrilled to find a rare yellow feather



By Noa McCarter, 8  
Collingswood, NJ

On the way back from a baseball game, the game I hit my first double, I was walking up to the snack bar with all five saved snack tickets clutched in my hand. I decided to walk farther up, when SCREEEEEEEECH!

I stopped dead in my tracks. I saw something on the ground. It appeared to be a bird's feather of some kind, so I flipped it over. In a flash of bright gold-yellow, there it was: a goldfinch feather.

I was sweating with amazement. Some people would call that an overreaction, like, "It's just a feather!" and, "You see those all the time!" The truth is, though, I hadn't ever seen a goldfinch or one of their feathers before.

I gave Mommy the amazing bright-yellow object called a goldfinch feather. That was, of course, after I'd shown it to everyone at the snack bar.

It was getting darker by the minute as we edged toward the car, when I spotted something completely different. A massive black beetle was slowly making its way close to the bushes. It was the largest live beetle I had ever seen. It was so black

that, for a second, it blended into the surrounding darkness as we reached the car.

Unfortunately, when we got home, we discovered that the goldfinch feather was no longer inside Mommy's purse. Tears trickled down my face as I sped into the bathroom . . . what an upsetting feeling, when you've just found something that can never be replaced, and it didn't even last a single day in your grasp.

I thought aloud to myself: "Maybe it's not gone, but that's unlikely . . . maybe it's some place we don't know about, like in the car somewhere . . . ?" A few of the tears disappeared.

Luckily, a few days later, the goldfinch feather was recovered!

Thank goodness it was hidden in Mommy's leather handbag in her grey VW Beetle. She'd forgotten that she had put it there.

It is now part of my growing feather collection, as my most valued piece. To this day, I am still amazed that I found the feather of a bird I have never actually seen.



# Willow Grove



By Eily A. Chiu, 9  
Virginia Beach, VA

My eyes open  
and smile  
as I hear  
the young cry  
of a rooster.  
I look up  
to the sky  
and say  
good morning  
to the world.  
The Snow Queen  
greet me  
with a benevolent gift  
of a curly white blossom.  
I smell  
the fresh gift  
of the queen  
as I emerge  
from the house  
to visit  
the world outside,  
plucking a myriad  
of rainbow blossoming buds  
that look like  
an endless field  
of happiness,  
dancing with the creatures

of the world.  
A cry  
from the goose,  
whose tender feathers  
look like  
a long carpet  
of shining silk,  
calls the flock.  
The flock comes  
to their humble leader  
and dances  
with the sun.  
A splatter  
from the brook  
brings delightful treasures  
sent as gifts  
to our beloved  
Willow Grove.  
I stretch out  
my young hands  
hoping for permission  
to drink the water  
as though I could be  
drinking beauty itself.  
In return,  
I pick  
a tender daisy  
and carefully  
give it to the stream.  
I look  
to the sun  
and say  
a humble thanks  
for this providential  
act of kindness  
the world  
has given  
me.



*Nest Building* (Panasonic Lumix DC-ZS200)  
Sage Millen, 13  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

# The Hummingbird Whisperer

After finding two abandoned baby hummingbirds, Michael must work hard to keep them alive



By Michael Chao, 13  
Rancho Palos Verdes, California

It was a lazy day in the month of May when I got that so-memorable phone call from my sometimes-bothersome twin sister, May.

"Michael, hurry, hurry, come over!" screamed my sister, who was practicing tennis with Mom at a nearby tennis court.

"Why? I'm busy!" I shouted back.

"There's two baby birds on the court. I think they're still alive."

My ears perked up, and instantaneously my irritating sister became my wonderful sibling. "I'm coming right now!"

I dragged Dad off the couch and made him drive me to the tennis courts. When we arrived, I saw Mom and May standing over two orphaned rufous hummingbirds, barely a week old. I couldn't believe my eyes. This was my first time seeing hummingbird nestlings.

They were only about the size of a stick of gum, pink-colored, and naked, with eyes closed. They shivered and ruffled what little down they had, trying to shelter from the ocean breeze. Delicately, I cupped

them into the palm of my hand while using my other hand to block the wind.

It was so nerve-racking to hold something so small and delicate. After gently placing the nestlings into a small insect cage padded with tissue paper, I began looking for their nest, hoping to find their mother, who was probably frantically seeking her young ones out.

Along the boundary of the tennis court was a ten-foot-tall chain-link fence with ivy covering it from top to bottom. The ivy had grown thick, and probably hadn't been cut back in years, which would make finding their home, a nest about the size of silver dollar, an almost impossible task.

But the "needle in a haystack" chance of finding their nest didn't deter me. I desperately wanted these little nestlings to live. I searched everywhere—every branch, nook, and cranny of ivy along the borders of the tennis court.

After a couple of nerve-racking hours, I finally found the nest. It was

located high up near the tree canopy, where neither my father, who is six-foot, three inches tall, nor I could reach. But mother bird was nowhere to be found.

I even tried to stand still and listen for the chirping sounds of their mother trying to call to her babies. Not a peep. The mother had probably given up.

Looking at Dad, I commanded, "I'm taking them home. I'll raise them." Realizing I wouldn't take no for an answer, Dad reluctantly nodded. He was tired. I was excited.

## A New Home

---

I gently carried the two fledglings to my "bug room," where I keep hundreds, maybe thousands, of various beetle specimens I've found in such exotic places as Japan, Thailand, Fiji, and Arizona. I'm a full-fledged, card-carrying amateur entomologist. Maybe now I'll double as an ornithologist.

By chance, I had found an old hummingbird nest some months back while hunting for mantids on tree bark. What a coincidence that I could actually put it to good use. I slipped the two pebble-sized nestlings into the nest and delicately laid a collection of twigs and branches in an eight-inch, square insect cage that I previously used to store my live *Coleoptera* (beetles) collection. It was now a makeshift birdcage.

Once settled, the larger of the two nestlings opened its beak, spread its tiny, skeletal wings, and

began chirping wildly. The second one followed. I panicked. *What do hummingbirds eat?*

I frantically searched the internet. There wasn't much information on hummingbird care, but I found one video describing that fledglings would happily gulp down a four-part water to one-part sugar solution supplemented with protein-rich insects. I whisked up the sugar water and luckily already had live mealworms that I use to feed my predatory insects.

## Feeding Time

---

The moment of truth. Feast or famine, literally. I dipped the syringe into the sugar water and held it in front of the larger chick. It quickly darted its head out of the nest and grabbed onto the syringe as I slowly squeezed the nectar into its beak. After a few gulps, the chick seemed content, closed its eyes, and went to sleep. The second one followed and did the same.

It actually worked! I rejoiced. This was my first big step toward becoming a bird whisperer. Things were looking positive.

The next day I offered the chicks some mealworm gut, which they ferociously ate up in seconds. Another milestone accomplished!

This became our routine for the next couple of days, from seven in the morning to nine at night. Dad pitched in too, taking care of the birds when I was at school. I'd enter the bug room just about every half an hour and the nestlings would burst into screeching chirps, beaks wide open and wings



flapping. A couple squirts of nectar and a few pieces of mealworm guts satisfied their hunger. They'd quiet down and fade into a drunken sleep.

## A Near-Death Experience

---

Five days had passed, and except for school, I hadn't left home once, ignoring various family outings like movie night or visits to Grandma and choosing to stick to my strict feeding and care regiment. They grew bigger, started to grow more feathers. My hard work was paying off.

"You have to go out to eat this time! Grandma's going too!" screamed May. "All you do is sit around and feed the stupid birds."

*No way am I going to get out of this one,* I thought to myself. But who would feed them? Could they last more than an hour without food? I was in panic mode.

I had a great idea. I'd overfeed the fledglings so they'd last until I returned home from dinner. Just before getting into the car, I fed them several times their normal doses of nectar and mealworms.

*Honk, honk.* "Hurry-up! Get in the car," yelled Dad.

Running out of time, I noticed their food crops, the pouch in a bird's neck that stores food, fill up and appear grotesquely enlarged. The fledglings looked to be choking as they tried to digest the sugar and proteins. Oh man! I might have killed them.

I didn't say a word during dinner, had no appetite for my shrimp

tempura, and didn't bother to order dessert (a first for me). I kept staring at my dad's watch, wondering if I'd ever see my two babies alive again.

That dinner was the most agonizing three hours I've ever experienced. Finally, after watching my sister gobble down two scoops of vanilla ice cream, Dad asked for the check.

The usual thirty-minute ride home seemed like hours. Each traffic light stop was just another nail in the coffin for the fledglings. Finally, the car screeched into the driveway. Darting out of the car, I could hear my heart beating a thousand times a minute. I gasped for air, opened the bug room door, and quietly tiptoed in the dark toward the cage. I could catch their dark shadows. They appeared dead, listless.

I started crying. What an idiot I was!

Wanting to make sure, I looked closer and could barely make out their chest feathers palpitating in sync with their heartbeats. They were still alive! But how much alive?

I turned the lights on. They awoke, necks popping up, and began their usual routine of chirping, wing-flapping, and beaks opening. It was music to my ears. I was once again at peace with myself. The bird whisperer and his birds lived on.

## Out of the Nest

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After a week, the fledglings started flapping their wings but still couldn't fly. They became more restless and even hopped onto the sides of the nest.

**They were curious about the wind, the sun, the other singing birds, and the vast, boundaryless sky. It was a whole new world to them.**

Soon after, the birds became more daring, climbing out of the comforts of their nest and perching on one of the thicker twigs off to the side of the cage. It was amazing, like seeing a baby walk for the first time. I extended my finger onto the perch, and they quickly darted toward my finger. It was a marvelous sight!

Each day brought a new experience, for both me and the fledglings. Soon, they were able to flutter around the room with ease. The insect cage was now too small, so I moved them into a larger butterfly cage previously used to breed monarch butterflies. They were happy, buzzing, floating, and chirping in their new, upgraded environs.

### Boomerang

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On a hot and muggy June day, I thought the siblings might like some sun. I gently carried the butterfly mesh to the backyard. Edging my index finger under their legs, they anxiously jumped on and, not wanting to frighten them, I slowly backed my finger out of the mesh.

Being accustomed to shelter, they seemed apprehensive at first, but slowly acclimated to their new environment. They were curious about the wind, the sun, the other singing birds, and the vast, boundaryless sky. It was a whole new world to them.

Then suddenly, without warning, the two rufouses took flight. About

ten feet away, they landed on my mother's favorite lemon tree. I approached them while raising my index finger, hoping they would hop on. They flew off again to a nearby rosebush. I approached. They took off again. Still only a few weeks old, the fledglings wouldn't last on their own; they still needed their mother's assistance for food. I panicked, again.

We played hide-and-seek a few more times before I came to my senses and realized I needed a new plan.

Using my giant insect net, I spotted one of the birds on a cement fence. Swoop! The bird fell helplessly into the net. I released it back into the mesh cage.

Catching the second rufous turned out to be a harder task. It became difficult to make visual contact with the bird as the sun was setting. I just heard its cheep. The Santa Ana winds didn't help either, as they dispersed the chirping sounds. All day long I went from tree to bush to flower trying to recover my friend.

Finally, the bird tired and settled on a pine tree. I used my net but missed miserably. It flew off, and I thought I had lost my only chance. Then suddenly it came back again, perched on a plum tree. I swung again. Strike two.

Now for sure I wasn't going to get a third chance, but it appeared again, this time on a sagebrush. As the sun was setting below the horizon, I knew this was my last chance. I swung as fast as I could. Yes! I got it. Relieved, I

placed my fine-feathered friend back  
in the butterfly mesh.

## Off They Go

---

Another week had passed, and the fledglings now looked like full-grown adults. Their downy fur had matured into sharp, well-defined feathers. Their pale-green feathers turned to a mix of turquoise green and bright yellow.

It was time. I knew this day would come. I dreaded it. But in some way, I was also happy to know that they would return to the wild where they truly belonged.

In the backyard, I unzipped the butterfly mesh. They did absolutely nothing and remained perched. I guess they too were dreading this day. I gently coaxed them out with some nectar. After a few gulps, they stayed for a while on my mother's lemon tree. At times they even begged for food, and I happily obliged.

Dusk was falling. I saw both birds fly up and find a good roost up in a pine tree.

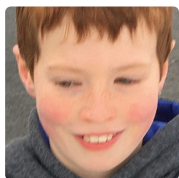
The next day passed, and I was surprised to see the birds still here. They were in my father's garden, sipping flowers. However, as I approached them, they flew off into a tree. From time to time during the next few days, I saw the birds. At times they were catching insects or drinking sugary nectar.

After a week in the wild, the birds stopped coming. I don't know what happened to them, but I'm sure they're doing well. Will they come back to visit me? I hope so.



*Taking Flight* (Watercolor)  
Saira Merchant, 12  
Bellaire, TX

# Hungry Time



By Daniel Shorten, 10  
Mallow, Ireland

Hungry time  
Low light on snow  
Tree line is red  
Chaffinch is up  
Blue tit too  
He was my summer friend  
But not now  
It's hungry time.

Cheep! He's here  
Birdseed boy  
Hands seed-heavy  
Crunchy boots.

Quick before the crows  
Awkward black thieves  
Out of the chimneys  
Dart—perch  
Check and check  
Now day's first peck.





*My Dream* (Pastel)  
Leticia Cheng, 9  
San Jose, CA

# Little Writer Boy

A young boy spends his days sitting in an alley, writing



By Jonah Christiansen-Barker, 13  
Campbell River, British Columbia, Canada

Long ago, far across the open sea, lived a little writer boy. Young Little Writer Boy would march through town, his red notebook at his side and his head held high. A vivid blue pen sat strung tight to the notebook's side. His ruffled overcoat swishing behind him in the wind, his grey tam pulled low over his head.

The boy walked to the alleyway that he'd so often ventured to and put his back to the stone, garbage-strewn ground in the opening where he could still look out over the shops full of bustling people or hear the hollow *ding dings* of passing bikes. Little writer boy would study the people waiting in line at shops, then his pen would start to move across the five-by-five-inch paper of his notebook as if it had a mind of its own.

The woman and poodle were really thieves. The old man wrapped in a scarf was a super villain in disguise, thought the boy. His heart would hop in excitement as he wrote, like it was doing hurdles but with no effort at all, as if it were flying over these hurdles. His heart would thump harder as the stories evolved around him, as the stories passed in his mind

like an old-fashioned slideshow film.

As the boy sat there, the polished black shoes of a black-suited man stopped inches from where he lay. The man rolled back the cuffs of his suit as if he were getting ready to give somebody a lump above their brow.

Little Writer Boy looked up at him. The man's red tie was even more vivid than the boy's pen. His sleek hair shone in spots from the sun, and his black suit shone like obsidian.

"Can I help you?" asked the little writer.

"Who are you?" asked the man.

The boy hesitated a moment. Then he said, "A writer."

The man eyed him, creasing his greasy brows. Then he walked away.

The boy walked home still letting his pen run across the paper. He walked up the stairs to his room, closed the door, and sat down in his red, spindly chair, and he wrote.

The following afternoon, the boy marched back to the alley and parked his butt where he could still survey the people of Van Isle.

As he wrote, a woman in high heels walked up to him, stopping inches away from him. This woman

wore a green dress with a beige overcoat and an animal-fur scarf. She wore a horrid smile that twitched upward with struggle.

"May I help you?" asked the boy.

"I was merely wondering what a respectable young man like you might be doing in an alleyway on your buttocks," said the woman.

"Writing."

The woman couldn't hold her smile in anymore. "Who are you?"

"I'm a writer."

"Have you anything that is published?" the woman said, chuckling at the boy's ambition.

The boy put a finger to his chin. "Published?" he asked. This time the woman gave a terrible, high, belly-shaking laugh. She seemed a lot like Santa Claus (an evil Santa Claus, that is). The people around her began to laugh too.

"Ever read a book, boy?" the woman mocked.

"Course I have." He put down his notebook but kept his eyes off the woman.

"Those are published books."

"Oh."

"Have you any of those?" she asked.

"I'm not sure."

"Then how do you know you're a writer?"

Little writer boy thought a while about this. When he got home, he sat in his spindly chair. His pen did not slide across the paper that night as it did every other night, nor did his heart leap the hurdles.

The little writer boy didn't go back to the alley the next day. Nor the next, nor the next, but a week later he did

go back.

"Who are you?" asked that same woman as she towered over him once more.

"A writer," the boy answered.

"Have you any published books?"

"I'm not sure."

"Then how do you know you are a writer?"

"Because I write."

The woman scowled, then sighed, then went on her way. Satisfied, the boy came back the next day and the next and the next. Many thieves and super villains later, an elderly man in boots came up to him.

"May I help you?" asked the boy.

"Who might you be?" asked the man.

"A writer."

"Oh," said the man. "Have you any published books?"

The boy stopped to think about this again. He tapped his forehead with his pen. Finally he looked up at the man's grizzled face.

"I do," he said. "As a matter of fact, it is right here." The boy handed the man his notebook, who read it and gave it back.

"That is no published book," said the old man.

"It is," said the boy. "You've read it."

The man squinted at him as if he were standing in a dark room. "What is your name, boy?"

At this the boy smiled. "Little Writer Boy."

# Chinese Test

For Mason, a Chinese test feels like an odyssey



By Mason Li, 8  
Berwyn, PA

It is time for the Chinese test to begin. I pick up my pencil, and focusedness is on my face as I write. Intensity stretches across the room with each moment. It is silent—so silent that I can hear the birds chirping . . . until . . . *Oh, no! I forgot one of my words!* I think to myself, *I can't fail after all this practice.*

I think harder than I ever have. Even the loudest sounds can't distract me. Finally, I think of it!

Calmness rises over the stress and intenseness as I calmly write each word. I finish the first page, then the second. Excitement rises in my stomach.

"I'm almost finished," I say to myself.

The third page is the hardest. I close my eyes as I let the nervousness flow out of my mouth, and I suck the courage in. I open my eyes and start writing again. Third and last page is complete! No—wait. Still one question . . . Excitement fades away.

It's the longest of all—write a Chinese paragraph. Each finished word disappears out of my mind, and each word ahead appears. It's like a bridge forming ahead and pieces falling behind. As I take steps on the developing bridge in my head, the bank comes closer with each step I take. Excitement rises higher and higher in my stomach. Light closes upon me: I'm finished at last!





*Woman with Chicken* (Acrylic)  
 Claire Jiang, 13  
 Princeton, NJ



# Losing Nani

After her grandmother dies, Maya reflects on what she most loved about her



By Maya Hooda, 10  
Noida, India

This December, I lost my *nani* (granny). I cannot even begin to describe the pain I feel right now. A lot of things I see around me have a bit of her in them; a lot reminds me of her. She had the most wonderful smile, and it aches my heart to know I will never see that smiling face again.

A few months ago I read a book called *Losing Grandpa*. It is about a little girl who loses her wonderful grandfather to illness. It made me very sad, but I never thought that the same thing would happen to me, and so soon.

Nani ran a little bookshop. She started it on her own. I used to spend hours in the shop with her, reading, talking, arranging books. She taught me about the magic of books, but she was never preachy. She used to weave stories around everything. She introduced me to many authors, like William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens—the first book I remember reading with her was *Macbeth*, Usborne Classics. We discussed it for hours...

Once, a barefoot kid came to the shop and asked her how much for a pen. She said that there are many

types of pens—some were for ten and some were for five and some for three. When he heard the number three, he was pleased. But his friend then asked him where he would even write with it. My lovely *nani* asked, “What do you write on?”

He said that he wrote everything on a wall or on the road. My *nani* asked, “With what?”

He shrugged and said, “With coal!” like it was the most natural thing to do.

My *nani* smiled and then gave him a full set of pens, notebooks, and stationery. She said, “Write to your heart’s content, *beta* (my child) and come back for more when you are done. But you need to show me what you write.”

This was Nani, always ready to help, caring, loving, working...

I have learnt so much from her—she loved plants, she loved to cook, she loved to read...

Once, I thought we could make a precious snack for all of us to eat together. My *nani* knew of a biscuit, and we decided to make it. At first I struggled, but my patient *nani* kept trying to fix it. My *nani* taught me so

well that I finally made the biscuit even better than her. I kissed her and thanked her for teaching me how to make such a lovely biscuit. And we all had a yummy snack.

What I am trying to say is that all grandmothers are wonderful, loving, and kind. They liven things up. But my nani was extraordinarily incredible.

I love you, Nani. I will miss you always. Please be happy wherever you are.

# Lines of Grace



By Emily Yen, 11  
Houston TX

My hand on paper  
Frozen in midair  
What should I write?  
About the wind on my face?  
The coolness of winter?  
The rays in the jubilant sky?  
I sit, in thought  
My mind reaches  
Trying to pull  
From the deepest part of mind  
Ideas  
I think  
The show last week  
The blue jay sitting in a tree  
Vines from our plant  
Reaching up to the sky  
One comes  
My hand starts moving  
Alive again  
With joy and grace  
Words appear  
Sitting there  
Boring looking  
Black and normal  
But yet  
What would I do without them?  
They are my lines of grace  
My way of communicating  
They are my language.

# My Bright Day

A fantastical encounter with light



By Ellen Wu, 7  
Knoxville, TN

I loved light. Even the sun wasn't bright enough. When I was chasing a firefly into the woods, I found a tree hollow. Light seemed to be coming out of the tree hollow. It said, "I can take you wherever you want."

I said, "Outer space!"

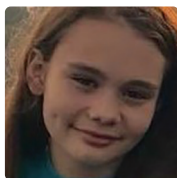
I was in outer space! I saw shining gold. I collected as much gold as I could. It was like a gold rush.

I went back to Earth. I gave the gold to my friend because she's scared of the dark. Now the light was finally bright enough.



*The Flower in Space* (Pastel)  
Leticia Cheng, 9  
San Jose, CA

# Nostalgia



By Sonia Teodorescu, 13  
Tampa, FL

Dark,  
Light,  
Dark,  
Light—

The clouds float across the sky, sometimes covering up the sun as they go.

Dark,  
Light,  
Dark—

Illuminating the room, then bringing it to a gentle shade,

Making shadows dance on the paper drawings tacked to the walls, in a room with  
an unused bed.

Flash—  
Light—  
Dark—  
Flash—

The light from the cars' headlights filters through the blinds,

One car's lights chase another's across the wall as they rush by in the night,

Going to places nobody knows,

As the clock ticks towards twelve,

On,  
Off,  
On,  
Off,  
Red,  
Green,



Blue,  
Christmas lights twinkle in the chilly air,  
Outside of houses with fantastical displays,  
Or on the stair railing of a house in the dark,  
Blue snowflakes hung in the window illuminate a face of joy in the winter,

A winter that means a Christmas tree and hot cocoa,  
And a fire,  
A gas fire,  
And later on a wood fire to sit next to,

Even though it belongs to someone else now,  
Fire does not forget,

The shingle on a rooftop looks like the pavement near the beach  
That lies beneath a baking sun,  
Next to crashing waves that once played tag with someone, and other childish  
games,

Even though the games are gone now,  
Water does not forget,

Swaying the leaves of palm trees,  
Near a house that lies resting,  
Wind brings rain that washes away the trenches and castles made in soil,  
Rain that is blown into windows,  
Gently,  
To rock someone to sleep,

Even though nobody lives behind those windows anymore,  
Wind does not forget.

Rain washes clean a road,  
Worn down by years,  
A flower grows on the side,  
And without being blown, sends its seeds into the wind,

Rain catches on the leaves of trees,

Catches in the grass,  
Two friends lie beneath,  
The air grows colder, autumn is coming,  
A time when someone used to scatter nuts and seeds for the birds to eat,  
And tried to spot a deer,

Even though nobody comes anymore,  
The earth does not forget.

By the pond surrounded with trees glistening with rain,  
A path well worn winds,  
A path where someone would run and laugh and talk,

People don't remember.



*Droplets* (Panasonic Lumix DC-ZS200)  
Sage Millen, 13  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

# Night Time

A day in the forest transforms into a vision of the world of happiness



By Maayan Mardiks-Rappaport, 10  
Bellevue, WA

I sit on the cold, barren log. I feel lonely and separate; the air feels like cold water dripping down my throat. I sit there as quiet as a hawk flying through the sky. Rain starts to pour down on my face. The rain clouds my face, putting protective armor around me. I'm as lonely as a star sitting alone in the big skies. I look down at the mushrooms; they have grown big, and they are climbing up my legs and up my spine and tapping on my back and whispering, "Be safe." They're gone.

I feel desperate, and I'm tired without any company, but then I remember the stories that my mom used to tell me. "Connect with the trees," she said. "They will be your friends." So that's what I do, but I still feel tired at the end. I stand up and whisper goodbye to my friends.

Then I leave the clearing. I see my friend walking and singing like nothing is wrong with the world, and I start to feel happy. My happiness vibrates from me to the stars and back again. But before I left to get to the world of happiness, I glanced back one more time to see my sit spot, the small clearing in the middle of

the forest. My sit spot is surrounded by large trees and plants, a lot of blackberries, and two large logs in the middle of everything.

We float up out of Earth and to the imaginary world, the world of happiness, rolling and spinning every once in a while. I think back to my sit spot; I think back to the mushrooms I imagined; I think back to the smell that I smelled. Mint. I smelled mint. I tasted salal and the smell of my mask. I heard the birds singing their song. I saw trees surrounding and protecting me. I felt a rough bark. The trees were like men protecting a palace. The rain was like words floating out of the trees. The stars were like little light bulbs, bobbing around the sky.

And finally we got to the world of happiness and love. Our feet touched the ground, and a group of people was walking toward us. We looked around. We were surrounded by nature on all sides. There was a large castle in the middle, and rufous hummingbirds were circling everyone. They had long beaks and coconut chests. They were beautiful! They looked like bubbles protecting

their castle. They also had tiny feet in the world, stiff and fat.

We smiled and drifted up to the castle. We were happy together.

# Highlight from Stonesoup.com

## Writing Workshop #53, with William

In this writing workshop, William asked participants to focus on an origin story of a great character



### Beginnings

By Madeline Kline, 12  
Potomac, MD

Everyone always focuses on the end. Never the beginning. When people talk about my writing, their comments always have something to do with my endings. People love a strong ending. They love a powerful note, a note that resonates with readers. They always forget the beginning. Always.

If life were a story, childhood would be the beginning. The first few notes, the introduction to the song, or the part of a story where the reader goes around getting accustomed to the characters.

If my life were a story, I would have too many characters in my beginning to keep track of. Me, my family, the people in my young writers club, everyone else I've ever known. The thing is, life keeps introducing new characters and forgetting about the old ones. It's almost as if the writer can't make up her mind. Should she keep this character throughout the story? Should she add someone else as the best friend? Should she add a redshirt, a character who's introduced only to dramatically leave the show?

But it doesn't matter what she does. Because nobody ever pays attention to the beginning. I find examples of that

throughout my life. When I get a bad grade on an eighth-grade assignment because I turned it in fifteen minutes late. It's the end of the world, but it's not. Because middle school doesn't matter. Neither did elementary school.

So why does childhood matter? Why do I need to add extravagant language, beautiful imagery, outstanding metaphors, when nobody pays attention anyway? Does childhood ever start to matter?

The answer is no, I think, as I turn the corner, heading uphill toward my high school. I'm alone outside, with no company but my own mind, and my own footsteps. The sun decided to sleep in today. When I left my house, it was still dark, and chilly. Now, the sun is lazily climbing out of bed, yawning. It radiates enough heat to push my jacket off my shoulders, and I pause to tie the jacket around my waist, now that I no longer need it.

*Read the rest of Madeline's piece at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-workshop>.*

### About the Stone Soup Writing Workshop

The Stone Soup Writing Workshop began in March 2020 during the COVID-19-related school closures. In every session, a *Stone Soup* team member gives a short presentation and then we all spend half an hour writing something inspired by the week's topic or theme. We leave our sound on so we feel as though we are in a virtual café, writing together in companionable semi-silence! Then, participants are invited to read their work to the group and afterward submit what they wrote to a special Writing Workshop submission category. Those submissions are published as part of the workshop report on our blog every week. You can read more workshop pieces, and find information on how to register and join the workshop, at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-workshop>.



# Honor Roll

Welcome to the Stone Soup Honor Roll. Every month, we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

## STORIES

Christina Kim, 12  
Katie Meng, 12  
Lucia Osborn-Stocker, 13  
Veda Vivek, 12  
Ethan Wang, 11

## POETRY

Eva Denne, 10  
Lorelai Ortiz, 8  
Ava Shorten, 11  
Rose Torrey, 8  
Anabelle Wilson, 13

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At our store, you will find . . .

- Current and back issues of *Stone Soup*
- Our growing collection of books by young authors, as well as themed anthologies and the *Stone Soup Annual*
- High-quality prints from our collection of children's art
- Journals and sketchbooks

. . . and more!

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- Monthly flash contests and weekly creativity prompts
- Blog posts from our young bloggers on everything from sports to sewing
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors

. . . and more content by young creators!

